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Sub-Saharan Africa: Long-term Demographic
Problems in Drought-afflicted Regions

Summary

The current drought and famine in Sub-Saharan Africa will aggravate the social and political turbulence already generated by three longstanding demographic trends in the region: rapid population growth, large numbers of internal and international refugees, and growing inequities in living conditions between urban and rural areas. We believe that these demographic pressures will complicate efforts by political leaders to maintain popular support and to foster economic development for at least the next decade.

- The population of Sub-Saharan Africa is growing faster than that of any other continent and of most LDCs. The rate of growth has accelerated from 2.3 percent a year in 1960 to 3 percent today, and the United Nations projects it will rise to 3.2 percent by the end of the century. At these rates the total population will grow from 415 million people today to around 690 million by the year 2000.
- The approximately 3 million refugees in Sub-Saharan countries are a constant drain on resources

This memorandum responds to a request by Malcolm Butler, Executive Secretary of the Agency for International Development. It was prepared by [redacted] the Office of African and Latin American Analysis and includes information available as of 15 January 1985. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Regional Issues Branch, ALA [redacted]

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urgently needed for national development in both the home countries of the refugees and the countries that receive them. In combination with the civil wars, insurgencies, and food deficits that cause refugee movements, the problems created by refugee populations strain the economic, social, and political structures of both sending and receiving countries.

- African governments tend to favor urban over rural areas because they view unrest in the cities as the greatest potential threat to internal stability. They recognize that the rapid growth of cities--whether the result of natural increase, economic migrations, or refugee flows--requires special attention and investment, usually at the expense of rural services and agricultural development.

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The need for governments to redirect their resources from economic and social development to crisis relief will, in our judgment, force some regimes to adopt coercive measures such as the current resettlement scheme in Ethiopia or the closing of borders to refugees as has been threatened by Sudan and the Central African Republic. In the short term, governmental efforts to resettle refugees or to deny them access to cities may achieve the desired result of getting the undesirables out of the public eye and away from the seat of government. Over the longer term, however, such moves will generate rising frustration, anger, and in some cases rebellion among those in both sending and receiving countries who have been the scapegoat of inefficient and short-sighted policies.

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Rapid Population Growth: The Long-term Threat

The statistics on population trends in Sub-Saharan Africa are discouraging. Rapid population growth will continue at a high level or even accelerate over the next several decades, according to UN projections. The rate of growth has accelerated from 2.3 percent a year in 1960 to 3 percent today, and the UN projects the total population of the region to grow from 415 million today to around 690 million by the year 2000.

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The population of Sub-Saharan Africa is growing faster than that of

any other continent and of most LDCs. According to UN statistics for 1984, the average annual growth rate of 37 of the 44 countries in the region is 3.1 percent, considerably faster than the LDC average of 2 percent. The seven with slower growth represent only 1.2 percent of the total Sub-Saharan population but also have a relatively high average rate of growth of 1.8 percent. Although the UN projects that the LDC growth rate will drop to an average annual 1.8 percent by the year 2000, it expects that of Sub-Saharan Africa to rise to 3.2 percent.

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Beyond just the sheer magnitude of the demographic statistics, however, rapid population growth is the greatest single long-term constraint on economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the World Bank. Population growth of 3 percent a year--with rates close to 4 percent in such countries as Kenya and Tanzania--puts extraordinary pressure on national food systems and reduces the availability of goods needed for basic welfare. According to estimates by the World Bank, per capita income in Sub-Saharan Africa is now about 4 percent below the 1970 level, and food production per capita has fallen by at least 20 percent over the past 10 years primarily because of population pressures on arable lands and rudimentary farming practices. Cultivators have been pushed onto more marginal agricultural areas in zones of lower and uncertain rainfall in parts of East Africa (Burundi, Kenya, and Rwanda), southern Africa (Lesotho, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe), and West Africa (Mauritania and Niger), according to analysis by the World Bank. Imports now provide a fifth of the Sub-Saharan region's food requirements.

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In our view, there is no lasting "Malthusian" solution to Africa's population growth. The loss of hundreds of thousands of persons through starvation and famine-caused illnesses over the past year will slow population growth only for the period of acute food deficits. The restoration of food supplies and some semblance of social order should, however, allow for the quick rehabilitation of populations and the probable reassertion of pre-existing population growth patterns. Documented studies of the Dutch famine of 1944-45 and the famine in parts of Bangladesh in 1974 show a resumption of normal birth and death levels within months of the amelioration of the food crises. In the case of Ethiopia:

- If famine had not afflicted the country, we would have expected the prevailing high fertility (crude birth rates of 49 per thousand population) and relatively high mortality (crude death rates of 21.5 per thousand population) to have resulted in a population of about 50.3 million in 1990 (assuming the preliminary census figure of 42.5 million in 1984 is correct).

- If we assume a famine-induced decline in the birth rate to 41.5 per thousand and an increase in deaths equal to the 300,000 estimated famine-induced deaths in 1984, and that these rates would be maintained for 1984 through 1986 when normal conditions of growth would return, we would still expect a population of 48.6 million in 1990. 25X1

Refugees: Destabilizing Consequences

In addition to the weight of famine itself, the burden of refugees and the costs of the other forces that generate them severely strain the ability of African nations to help themselves. They drain economic, physical, and human resources that ideally would be assigned to development projects to upgrade the national standard of living. 25X1

International Refugees. Whether generated by civil war, insurgency, or famine, international refugees tend to cause social and political instability in both sending and receiving countries. A review of official, academic, and public literature on refugee movements throughout the world over the past several decades indicates that:

- The presence of refugees may draw the receiving country into the sometimes violent internecine conflicts or international disputes of the sending country, such as is currently occurring between Thailand, Kampuchea, and Vietnam.
- Pressures for refugee assistance tend to aggravate already existing conflicts, such as those between Ethiopia and Sudan over suspected aid to insurgent groups under cover of refugee assistance.
- Ethnic and religious tensions can be distorted or heightened not only at the time of movement and resettlement but even decades later, as in the continuing impasse between Rwanda and Uganda over the proposed repatriation of 100,000 Tutsis who fled to Uganda following the 1959 Rwandan revolution in exchange for 31,000 Hutus forcibly sent out of Uganda to border camps in Rwanda in 1982.
- Donors of humanitarian aid often demand access to regions of a country or to institutions deemed politically sensitive by a government or its political opponents. This has occurred in Pakistan since the flight of Afghan refugees to Pakistani border areas began in 1979.
- The attention and care given to refugees may engender

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animosities among citizens of the receiving country who live in conditions not much better than a refugee camp--currently a major problem in Sudan and Somalia.

- The sending country is always under regional and international pressure to arrange for and accept the repatriation of its citizens. Such repatriation may be difficult or impossible, at least in the short term, particularly if civil or social disorder was one of the causes of the refugee movement, as in the ongoing conflicts in Chad, Ethiopia, and Mozambique.

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In the absence of voluntary repatriation or third country resettlement, international aid resources are increasingly being shifted from care and maintenance of refugees to comprehensive programs integrated with host country development plans. The Second International Conference for Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II) in July 1984 was aimed at devising programs to help host countries cope with large, semi-permanent refugee populations while at the same time accomplishing national economic and social development. Fourteen countries claiming about 2.5 million refugees or returnees submitted proposals for a total of 128 agricultural, educational, social, and physical infrastructure projects that would cost approximately \$300 million. Donors expressed interest in about one-third of the projects, all designed to reinforce the areas most affected by the arrival or return of refugees such as the provision of secondary, vocational, and technical education, agricultural improvement, reforestation, and water supply.

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Internal Refugees. Internal stability and opportunities for development are also undermined in countries experiencing spontaneous movements of large numbers of their own citizens seeking food or refuge. Governments are usually ill-equipped to cope with the physical needs of refugees and reluctant for political reasons to admit that a serious problem exists. Spontaneous settlement in and around capital cities and other major urban centers, where refugees tend to go in the belief food and security will be available, is usually met by the government's denials of their plight and alarm at the suggestion of unrest that their presence signals. This has occurred most recently, for example, in Ethiopia. At the same time, governments tend to try to force refugees out of cities or to deny entry altogether, such as currently in Ethiopia and Chad, to protect the existing urban populations from want and to keep the sight of hungry or frightened people from international view. Chad has established five feeding centers in the vicinity of N'Djamena in an attempt to prevent the major portion of the estimated 80,000 refugees flowing toward the capital from entering the city.

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While the historical record shows that internal refugees often return home when conditions permit, there have been increasing instances of groups staying permanently in their area of refuge, often remaining as outsiders with no inclination or ability to adapt to life-styles dictated by the new region. As a result, a new permanent underclass, with few of the skills necessary for urban living, is being created in several already overburdened African cities. For example, nomads in Mauritania who remained around Nouakchott after the 1973 Sahelian drought are still living in impoverished neighborhoods and have been integrated only slightly into the life of the city. They have been joined by thousands of additional nomads made destitute by drought in the past few years. Nomads in Mali have followed a similar pattern.

The Urban-Rural Split: A Worsening Problem

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In addition to problems of rapid total population growth and refugee movements, most Sub-Saharan countries are woefully equipped to manage the rapid urbanization that is occurring there. Although Sub-Saharan Africa is the least urbanized region in the world, with only slightly more than a quarter of its people living in cities, urban growth rates average a high 5.5 percent a year, ensuring a doubling of the overall urban population in 12 years. As is the case with the total population, studies of urban development patterns show that it is the speed with which the cities are growing--rather than their absolute size--that strains governmental resources and management.

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A look at African demographic and social data indicate that generally poor rural conditions and the punishing physical drudgery of farming have led to rural flight even in good economic times, sharpening the urban-rural split. Numerous demographic surveys have shown that rural migrants view city life as preferable to rural in part because they expect greater opportunities to be available to their children if not to themselves.

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The flight to the cities is intensifying in most drought-stricken countries and includes in some instances the unprecedented displacement of entire villages or tribal groups. In Mali, US Embassy officers estimate that nearly one-third of the 126,000-person population in the Niger River floodplain has migrated from farms to join extended family households in major towns or to set up makeshift camps on their outskirts. We estimate that a large proportion of these destitute people will remain in the towns and cities, even after the worst effects of the food crises are ameliorated, because they will be unable to return to rural areas until complex countrywide rural rehabilitation programs are begun.

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An Anti-Rural Policy Bias. A review of academic literature and the policies of African states over the past several decades indicates that nearly all African governments favor urban over rural areas. One reason is that post-independence African leaders tended to view the agricultural sector as the source of surplus revenue to finance what they perceived to be more important industrial development. Consequently, governments devoted few resources to domestic food crops, preferring to focus development spending on export crops that could earn foreign exchange. Another reason is that most governments believe that the main threat to political stability comes from the demands of politically-active or potentially disruptive urban residents, not from farmers who are not organized and are far from the centers of power. One way to reduce urban discontent is to assure the availability of plentiful, cheap food.

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The food pricing and marketing policies of African governments have reflected these priorities.

- In most African countries, prices of key staples are regulated by the state rather than the free market. Prices paid to farmers for their crops are kept deliberately low--often at levels insufficient to cover production costs--to subsidize politically volatile urban consumers. Farmers, as a result, have little incentive to expand production beyond the immediate needs of their families. In our judgment, these conditions are especially acute in Tanzania, Mali, and Mozambique.
- According to US agricultural analysts, the food policies of African governments generally concentrate on filling urban preference for high-quality imported wheat and rice (often at subsidized prices) rather than relying on local grains and other foodstuffs. This policy not only discourages domestic production but drains foreign exchange. Ethiopia, for example, is using scarce foreign exchange to cover urban food requirements while using the military to keep the rural hungry from entering the cities, according to reports from the US Embassy.

Under prodding from international and Western aid donors, some African governments are trying to liberalize their state-run agricultural sectors and to redress the anti-rural policy bias--with solid success in a few states such as Zimbabwe and Kenya. According to a review of press and Embassy reporting:

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- Senegal and Somalia have turned over the marketing of many domestic agricultural products to the private sector.

- Mali has relinquished the government's monopoly control over sorghum and millet as a condition for receiving an IMF standby accord.
- Since 1980 Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania have raised prices paid to farmers for some food crops in order to encourage production.

In our judgment, these kinds of reforms offer some hope of progress in meeting the food needs of the rapidly expanding population, but their immediate impact has in many cases been offset by the effects of drought.

Outlook

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We expect that the current drought will increase the social and political turbulence already generated by rapid population growth, refugee movements, and favoritism for urban over rural areas in the policies of African governments. In our view, these fundamental, long-term trends will be underlying determinants of instability in the severely drought-affected countries for at least the next decade. Moreover, we do not expect the reconstruction of normally functioning societies with even the low pre-drought levels of economic activity and public services in this decade. We expect that education, health, population programs, housing, public transportation, and other welfare and service sectors will suffer as a substantial portion of the limited human and monetary resources available will be drawn off into meeting crises connected with food shortages and agricultural rehabilitation.

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The need for governments to redirect their resources from economic and social development to crisis relief will, in our judgment, force some regimes to adopt coercive measures such as the current resettlement scheme in Ethiopia or the closing of borders to refugees as has been threatened by Sudan and the Central African Republic. In the short term, governmental efforts to resettle refugees or to deny them access to cities may achieve the desired result of getting the undesirables out of the public eye and away from the seat of government. Over the longer term, however, such moves will generate rising frustration, anger, and in some cases rebellion among those in both sending and receiving countries who have been made the scapegoat of inefficient and short-sighted policies.

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SUBJECT: SubSaharan Africa: Long-term Demographic Problems in Drought-afflicted Regions

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